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## Act Local or Global?: Comparing Student Experiences in Domestic and International Service-Learning Programs

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*International service-learning (ISL) is a popular way to facilitate student growth in the areas of cross-cultural learning and civic engagement. However, many have questioned whether international trips provide any added value compared to domestic service-learning. Using the context of Alternative Break programs, this study compares student experiences in similarly structured international and domestic service-learning programs. In doing so, it contributes to the larger debate over the relative costs and benefits of international service-learning programs.*

Over the past several decades, civic engagement and global citizenship have become increasingly popular goals in higher education (American Council on Education, 2002; Campus Compact, 2011; Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship, 2005; Ewers, 2009). Accordingly, the prevalence of service-learning opportunities and study abroad experiences has swelled, and programs blending the two have emerged. International service learning (ISL) is a popular way to facilitate student growth in the areas of cross-cultural learning and civic engagement. However, some scholars and practitioners have argued that cross-cultural learning can happen within the United States (Jacoby, 2009; Marmon, 2007), and as such, international programs may not be necessary. The purpose of this study is to explore this very question: to investigate the possible differences that may exist between students' experiences of international and domestic service-learning programs using data from Alternative Breaks.

According to Bringle and Hatcher (2011), ISL is:

A structured academic experience in another country in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that addresses identified community needs; (b) learn from direct interaction and cross-cultural dialogue with others; and (c) reflect on the experience in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a deeper understanding of global and intercultural issues, a broader appreciation of the host country and the discipline, and an enhanced sense of their own responsibilities as citizens, locally and globally. (p. 19)

International service-learning bridges the three

separate yet related fields of service-learning, study abroad, and international education (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011). ISL programs can take a variety of forms, including single courses that take place entirely in host-country (often 6-8 weeks in length), sandwich programs involving a shorter time in a foreign country within an on-campus academic course before and/or after the ISL experience (which may or may not also include a domestic service-learning experience), international practicum or internship experiences (Jones & Steinberg, 2011), or co-curricular programs such as Alternative Breaks that, while not credit-bearing experiences, often include structured reflection and learning (Break Away, n.d.a; Niehaus, 2012a).

A number of studies have pointed to the positive outcomes associated with ISL participation. In one of the most comprehensive studies of ISL, Kiely (2004) interviewed 22 students who had taken part in an ISL program in Nicaragua over a period of seven years. He found that the ISL experience had a profound effect on participants, and identified changes in students' worldviews along six dimensions: political, moral, intellectual, cultural, personal, and spiritual. The changes in students' worldviews were also accompanied by evidence of action or intended action; for example, political transformation included advocacy on behalf of the poor or efforts to raise awareness about poverty, and personal transformation involved efforts to live a more socially conscious lifestyle and change career or educational goals. Participants in Kiely's study "'envisioned' changes to their lifestyles, relationships, and social policies to coincide with their newly found critical awareness of

the systemic forces underlying the economic disparities, health problems, and poverty witnessed in Nicaragua” (p. 10). Upon returning to the United States, students struggled to integrate their changed worldviews into their lives and to implement their envisioned plans. Kiely labeled this phenomenon as the “chameleon complex,” which “represent[ed] the internal struggle between conforming to, and resisting, dominant norms, rituals, and practices in the United States” (p. 15).

Similar to Kiely’s findings on the long-term nature of student transformation from ISL, Tonkin’s (2004) report on the effects of ISL programs associated with the International Partnership for Service Learning and Leadership emphasized the profound and lasting impacts of international service-learning. Compared to students in traditional study abroad programs, students who had participated in ISL demonstrated deeper intellectual and moral changes, greater demonstration of leadership qualities, and higher levels of culture shock and reentry shock than conventional study abroad students (Tonkin).

Other studies, primarily small case studies, have reported similar outcomes related to ISL participation. In these studies, students reported that they changed their major (King, 2006; Lewis & Niesenbaum, 2005) or career goals (King; Pisano, 2007); committed to integrating their new knowledge into their future career (Ferrence & Bell, 2004); explored different academic courses (Lewis & Niesenbaum); desired to participate in future study or travel abroad (Lewis & Niesenbaum); learned about and gained empathy for the host culture (Ferrence & Bell; Pagano, 2003); felt that they had changed as people (Pisano, 2007); demonstrated an increased efficacy to help others (Elble, 2009); and became more aware of social problems (Elble).

While a variety of studies summarized above have pointed to the potential for ISL programs to facilitate student learning and development, it is unclear whether or not this is any different than the learning and development facilitated by domestic service-learning (e.g., Eyler & Giles, 1999, among many others). Unfortunately, existing research that compares experiences in international and domestic service-learning is limited and somewhat contradictory; some studies have asserted more powerful outcomes for domestic service-learning experiences, others have demonstrated the added benefit of international experiences, and still others have found no conclusive differences in the skills and attitudes resulting between the two types of service-learning.

As many scholars have asserted, cross-cultural exposure can be a benefit of both domestic and international service-learning experiences. In fact, Jacoby (2009) argued that students do not need to travel

abroad to gain cross-cultural experience; these types of experiences can be facilitated much closer to home. Jacoby’s argument is backed up by some studies on domestic service-learning that have identified cross-cultural learning outcomes associated with these experiences. For example, in a case study of seminary students placed in local, cross-cultural ministry practica, Marmon (2007) found that these students experienced transformative cross-cultural learning within their own communities, similar to the learning that would have occurred through international experience. In another case study, Ferrence and Bell (2004) studied 25 undergraduate education majors who took part in a two-week cultural immersion with a Spanish-speaking Latino community in Georgia. Similar to Marmon’s findings, Ferrence and Bell found that many of the culture shock and immersion experiences of these students paralleled those experienced by students travelling abroad. Students in this program reported that through their own experience being an outsider and not understanding what was going on around them (most students did not speak Spanish), they gained a greater understanding of cultural differences and empathy for immigrant children who might be in their future classrooms. They also came to a new understanding of the mismatch of immigrant children’s cultural background and the culture of U.S. classrooms, particularly in the ways in which lessons presume cultural knowledge that may be different for Latino children.

While the studies by Marmon (2007) and Ferrence and Bell (2004) point to the potential for domestic service-learning experiences to be just as profound and transformative as ISL, others have argued that international experiences are fundamentally different. Kraft (2002) argued that the physical travel and cultural and language competencies necessitated by ISL amplify the cross-cultural learning that takes place abroad relative to domestic programs with a cross-cultural component. A few empirical studies have supported Kraft’s assertion. As there is little research directly comparing international and domestic service-learning, most of this evidence comes from the larger study abroad literature.

In one study, Couper (2001) compared students who had studied abroad with those who had traveled domestically. That study found that those who had studied abroad and experienced a different culture did not find personal change back home, such as a new job or a move to a different location, to be as stressful; because of their international experience, changes at home were much less traumatic. Although not specifically focused on ISL, Couper’s findings point to the potential for international experiences to provide greater cognitive dissonance for students than domestic experiences.

In another comparison of study abroad and domestic travel, Uehara (1986) surveyed 96 study abroad returnees and a similar group of students who had travelled domestically. While his intention was to use the domestic travelers as a control group, his study provides some evidence as to the differences between international and domestic travel. He found that students who had studied abroad experienced significantly more reentry shock than students who had travelled domestically. He also found that the only factor measured that was significantly associated with increased levels of reentry shock was the extent to which students' values had changed while abroad. These values related to relationships with family and friends; views about male-female relationships, clothing, religion, and individuality; ways of using money; career goals; and achievement-oriented behavior.

An important limitation of both of these studies is that they compared programs and experiences that were very different in nature—study abroad and general domestic travel—making it difficult to isolate the difference between international and domestic experiences. Marmon (2007) and Ferrence and Bell (2004) only looked at domestic service-learning experiences, providing no comparison to ISL. Both ISL and domestic service-learning have been shown to contribute to positive learning outcomes for students (Astin & Sax, 1998; Astin, Sax & Avalos, 1999; Chaison, 2008; Denson, Vogelgesang, & Saenz, 2005; Dockter, 2004; Elble, 2009; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Jones & Abes, 2004; Lough, 2010), but few if any studies directly compare similarly structured domestic and international service-learning experiences. This lack of direct comparison makes it difficult to isolate the effect of the international location on student experiences and to ascertain if there is a value-added when service-learning is experienced internationally.

### Alternative Break Programs

One of the challenges in comparing international and domestic service-learning is that these programs tend to be fundamentally different. Domestic service-learning often takes place for a few hours each week over the course of a semester, while international service-learning is more likely to span a briefer period but on a more intense basis. One way to overcome this challenge is by studying Alternative Break (AB) programs, which take place either within the United States or internationally. While there is some diversity within the design and execution of AB programs, they provide a venue for comparing similarly structured international and domestic service-learning experiences.

Alternative breaks have existed for more than 30 years as a means of engaging students in service projects involving travel outside their immediate com-

munity. Break Away, a national organization that promotes and supports AB programs, defines an *Alternative Break* as a program that:

places teams of college or high school students in communities to engage in community service... during their summer, fall, winter, weekend or spring breaks... The objectives of an alternative break program are to involve college students in community-based service projects and to give students opportunities to learn about the problems faced by members of communities with whom they otherwise may have had little or no direct contact. (Break Away, n.d. a)

Research on AB programs has identified a number of student learning outcomes similar to those found through domestic and international SL. For example, research suggests that participating in an AB experience encourages students to step outside of their comfort zone and interact with and learn from people different from themselves (Jones, Robbins, & LePeau, 2009; Jones, Rowan-Kenyon, Ireland, Niehaus, & Skendall, 2012; Niehaus, 2012b; Skendall, 2012); influences students' academic major, career plans, and intentions to volunteer, engage in advocacy, study abroad, and travel abroad (Ivory, 1998; Jones et al., 2009; Jones et al., 2012; Niehaus, 2012a); challenges students' values (Jones et al., 2012; Rhoads & Neururer, 1998); helps students learn about and personalize complex social issues (Chaison, 2008; Jones et al., 2009; Jones et al., 2012); and increases students' self-confidence and sense of empowerment (Chaison; Rhodes & Neururer), sense of social responsibility (Cooper, 2002), and commitment to helping others (Jones et al., 2009; McElhaney, 1998; Rhodes & Neururer).

Break Away identifies eight components of a quality alternative break (Break Away, n.d. b): strong direct service, orientation, education, training, reflection, reorientation, diversity, and alcohol/drug free. In exploring outcomes related to Break Away's eight components, along with other key program characteristics identified in the literature on Alternative Breaks, study abroad, and international and domestic service-learning, Niehaus (2012a) found that AB-participating students' future plans were positively related to:

- the extent to which students engaged with the service activities and community, were emotionally and physically challenged by the experience, learned about social issues related to their AB trip, and found the AB trip to be an emotionally intense experience;
- the frequency with which students interacted with community members and host site staff;

- the amount students reported learning from community members, host site staff, and other college students on their trips;
- the frequency with which students wrote in an individual journal; and
- the comprehensiveness of the orientation and reorientation experiences.

Niehaus (2012a) did compare the influence of international versus domestic service-learning on students' future plans, and found that students who had participated in international trips were more likely than those on domestic trips to report that their AB experience influenced their intentions or plans to study or travel abroad. After accounting for a wide variety of other program characteristics, the international program location was not a significant predictor of the influence of the AB program on students' major, career plans, or plans to volunteer or engage in advocacy. However, Niehaus did not examine whether the influence of program location on student outcomes may be mediated by differences in students' actual experiences on domestic versus international programs (e.g., whether the differences in outcomes, or lack thereof, may be due to factors such as the quality of the service experience or the amount of reflection, rather than due to the program location itself). To date, no studies have directly compared international and domestic Alternative Breaks to determine if students' *experiences* on these trips (e.g., engagement with the community, service quality, reflection, etc.) differ in any fundamental way.

### Purpose

The prior literature on international and domestic service-learning is limited in two key ways. First, few studies compare international and domestic experiences (either in the context of service-learning or in study abroad more generally), and those that do have been unable to identify truly equivalent international and domestic experiences upon which to base that comparison. Second, studies that have examined the influence of international versus domestic program locations in predicting student outcomes have stopped short of exploring the different types of experiences that students may have in international and domestic programs, which may mediate the relationship between program location and outcomes.

As such, the purpose of this study is to identify what differences (if any) exist between the experiences of students participating in domestic and international Alternative Break service-learning trips. In their recommendations for the design of research examining international service-learning, Bringle, Hatcher, and Williams (2011) encouraged the comparison of program characteristics that shape the ser-

vice-learning experience; in the case of the present study, comparing domestic and international experiences. In doing so, this study fills the gap in the existing service-learning literature by providing a direct comparison of similarly structured international and domestic service-learning experiences, contributing to exploration of whether there is value-added to international service-learning programs compared to domestic ones.

### Methods

#### *Data: The National Survey of Alternative Breaks*

Data for this study come from the 2011 National Survey of Alternative Breaks (NSAB), a multi-institutional survey of AB participants (Niehaus, 2012a). The NSAB included more than 2000 student respondents (an overall 35% response rate), representing almost 450 different AB trips at 97 colleges and universities across the United States. Due to missing data in variables of interest, this study utilized a sample of 1679 total respondents from the survey.

The NSAB survey was administered online to students within approximately three weeks of returning to campus after their 2011 Alternative Spring Break experience. A random stratified sample of institutions was selected to participate based on a list of Alternative Break programs developed by Break Away, and included both Break Away member campuses and non-members. All programs in the study lasted approximately one week and involved community service and service-learning activities. Students responding to the survey were asked a variety of questions on their background, prior experiences, the details of their trip, to what extent they felt that their AB experience would influence their future plans (e.g., career or volunteering), and what experiences they had upon returning to campus.

Consistent with other available samples of students participating in Alternative Breaks specifically (Skendall, 2012), or study abroad and service-learning more generally (Gasiorski, 2009; Institute for International Education, 2011), the students in this sample were predominantly female (79%) and White (72%), with smaller percentages of Asian/Pacific Islander (9%), Multiracial (6%), African American (6%), and Hispanic (5%) students. Most students participated in domestic (i.e., within the United States) Alternative Breaks (83%) with a smaller number participating in international Breaks (17%). More than half of the students (54%) in the sample attended doctoral/research universities, while 28% attended master's universities, 16% baccalaureate colleges, and 1% associates degree-granting institutions. The majority of students (61%) attended public institutions, while 25% attended private religious institutions and 14%



attended private, non-religious institutions.

Students responding to the survey went on trips to 235 different locations. The most popular domestic destinations were New Orleans (9%), Atlanta (4%), and Washington, DC (3%), while the most popular international destinations were Honduras, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala and Belize (each representing approximately 1% of respondents). AB trips focused on more than 50 different social issues, the most common of which were affordable housing (15%), environmental issues (11%), and education (10%). During their AB experience, students engaged in a variety of different service tasks, including manual labor (59%), direct involvement with people receiving service such as tutoring children (31%), and preparing and/or delivering meals (6%). Most students in the sample participated in co-curricular AB experiences, but 8% participated in an AB as part of an academic course.

### *Variables*

In the conceptual framework for the NSAB, Niehaus (2012a) brought together the existing research on Alternative Breaks, domestic and international service-learning, and study abroad to identify the types of experiences within Alternative Break programs that may contribute to student outcomes. The composite variables used in this study are those that, in prior work with the NSAB data, Niehaus (2012a) created using exploratory principle components analysis (Lattin, Carroll, & Green, 2003); other variables were operationalized using single items on the survey. Each variable reflects an aspect of students' experiences before, during, and after AB trips that, according to prior research (e.g., Niehaus, 2012a; Niehaus, 2012b; Niehaus & Rivera, 2013), are key predictors of student outcomes. These variables included:

- *Service engagement*: Six-item scale ( $\alpha = .806$ ) reflecting the extent to which students felt that they were making positive contributions, had important levels of responsibility, were active participants rather than observers, engaged in a variety of tasks, and received input and appreciation from on-site supervisors;
- *Community engagement*: Five-item scale ( $\alpha = .875$ ) reflecting the extent to which students worked directly with and were able to develop relationships with members of the community, the community was involved in the design and execution of the project, and students felt that they were meeting community-identified needs;
- *Community/staff interaction*: Two separate variables reflecting the frequency with which students reported interacting with community members or host site staff;
- *Community/staff/student difference*: Three separate variables reflecting the extent to which students felt that community members, host site staff, or other college students participating in their trip were different from themselves;
- *Community/staff/student learning*: Three separate variables reflecting the amount students reported learning from community members, host site staff, and other college students participating in their AB trip;
- *Intensity of the experience*: Four-item scale ( $\alpha = .760$ ) reflecting the extent to which students agreed that they experienced strong emotions, their AB trip was an intense experience, it allowed them to experience something totally new, and it caused them to re-examine their beliefs about the root causes of social issues;
- *Emotional challenge*: The extent to which students felt that they were emotionally challenged by their experience;
- *Physical challenge*: The extent to which students felt that they were physically challenged by their experience;
- *Social issues*: Six-item scale ( $\alpha = .844$ ) reflecting the extent to which students agreed that they were able to see the larger context of the social issue addressed by their AB experience, that they came to a greater understanding of and were able to connect real people to that social issue, they were able to come to a greater understanding of the region where their trip took place, and they were able to connect what they learned in their AB experience to other things they have learned outside of the classroom;
- *Reflection*: Four-item scale ( $\alpha = .822$ ) reflecting the frequency with which students spent time as a group reflecting on their experiences, discussed the impact of their service work with other students or student trip leaders, or engaged in other activities as a group that helped them reflect on their experiences;
- *Journaling*: How frequently students wrote in an individual journal;
- *Orientation*: The total number of activities in which students reported engaging prior to their trip (out of seven possible choices), including: learning about the mission and objectives of the agency or organization with which they were serving; learning about the history or culture of the location to which they travelled; receiving training in skills necessary for the

project they would work on; learning about the social issue being addressed by their trip; discussing culture shock or cross-cultural communication skills; and

- *Reorientation*: The total number of activities in which students reported engaging prior to their trip (out of 8 possible choices) including: discussing their experiences with the other students on their trip, other AB trips, or other (non-participating) students; and receiving information on reverse culture shock, other ways to build on their AB experience, or other community service and service-learning opportunities.

### *Data Analysis*

To determine whether or not the key program experiences described above differed for international versus domestic programs, this study first employed multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), which was selected to determine the significance of each variable as well as the impact of variables in tandem. When utilizing a MANOVA, moderately high levels of correlation are desirable, as this indicates that variables exert individual influence.

As a post-hoc analysis, discriminant function analysis (DFA) was employed to determine whether the presence of certain variables is valid in predicting group membership (Pedhazur, 1997). In this case, variables from the NSAB data set were used to attempt to classify AB participants into either domestic or international program groups based on outcomes associated with their experience. This allowed the researchers to determine which student experiences differed most between international and domestic AB trips.

### *Results*

The MANOVA analysis demonstrated that as a group, the variables described above do differ between international and domestic AB experiences (Wilkes' Lambda=.880,  $p<.001$ ). Post-hoc DFA showed that almost all of the individual variables differed significantly based on whether the student participated in an international or domestic AB trip, and had to do with engaging with the community, interacting across difference, and the intensity of the experience. According to the DFA results, compared to students on domestic trips, students participating in international trips on average reported significantly more frequent community and host site staff interaction, higher levels of community engagement, learning more from the community and host site staff, more frequent individual journaling and group reflection activities, more comprehensive orientation

and reorientation programs, more emotionally intense experiences, feeling that community members and host site staff were more different from themselves, more emotionally challenging experiences, and learning more about social issues. At the same time, there were a number of areas that showed no difference between international and domestic programs, including the extent to which students felt physically challenged by their experience, the extent to which they engaged in the service activities, and their interactions with other students on their trip (see Table 1).

### *Limitations*

Before moving on to a discussion of the results of this study, it is important to first note a few key limitations. First, this study focuses on one particular type of service-learning experience—Alternative Breaks. While this may speak to differences between international and domestic service-learning more broadly, the results are not generalizable across all types of service-learning programs. Second, this study only addresses the question of whether students' *experiences* of international and domestic AB programs are fundamentally the same. The results of this study can inform the larger discussion about the benefits of international service-learning, but final judgment on the value of international service-learning is still up for debate.

Third, we were limited in our analysis to those variables present in the NSAB data. While other variables such as experiences with language and culture may be important differences between international and domestic Alternative Breaks, we were not able to include these in our analysis. Similarly, a fourth limitation is that we were unable to account for an array of variations in program quality in the programs represented in the data. For example, staff working with AB programs may spend more time intentionally designing international trips than domestic trips due to the more complicated nature of international travel. In fact, as discussed below, our findings do point to key differences between students' experiences on international and domestic trips that would seem to be independent of program location, such as the amount of time spent on reflection and the comprehensiveness of the orientation and reorientation experiences.

Finally, this study does not speak directly to student outcomes. However, the variables considered in this study are those that have been found to be predictive of a number of student outcomes (Niehaus, 2012a, 2012b; Niehaus & Rivera, 2013), and as such they are important to consider when examining key differences between students' experiences on international and domestic AB programs. For example, various combinations of these variables have been found

Table 1  
Group Means and DFA Coefficients

	International	Domestic	<i>p</i> -value	Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients <sup>1</sup>	Structured Matrix Coefficients <sup>2</sup>
Community Interaction	3.63	2.90	<.001	.380	.597
Journaling	2.10	1.36	<.001	.427	.505
Orientation	6.06	5.24	<.001	.377	.502
Community Engagement	21.26	19.00	<.001	.288	.494
Community Learning	3.71	3.35	<.001	.025	.409
Community Difference	2.76	2.41	<.001	.134	.328
Intensity of the Experience	21.10	19.89	<.001	.019	.327
Staff Difference	1.92	1.62	<.001	.211	.299
Emotional Challenge	4.13	3.82	<.001	.013	.273
Staff Interaction	3.72	3.43	<.001	.261	.271
Reflection	12.46	11.71	.001	-.014	.228
Reorientation	6.04	5.72	.004	-.016	.191
Social Issues	22.68	22.15	.006	-.105	.184
Staff Learning	3.33	3.14	.006	.143	.184
Physical Challenge	3.36	3.22	.083	.133	.116
Service Engagement	26.42	26.57	.523	-.330	-.043
Student Learning	3.33	3.37	.501	-.152	-.045
Student Difference	1.73	1.71	.821	.002	.015

Note: italicized *p*-values indicate significant mean differences (<.05).

<sup>1</sup>Indicates the importance of each variable in predicting group assignment; partial correlation.

<sup>2</sup>Indicates the correlation between discriminant score and each variable; whole correlation.

to be positive predictors of the influence of the AB experience on students' major, career plans, and intentions to volunteer, engage in advocacy, and study or travel abroad (Niehaus, 2012a); the extent to which students are able to learn from diverse others through their AB experience (Niehaus, 2012b); and the extent to which the AB experience influences' students' religious identity and commitment (Niehaus & Rivera, 2013).

### Discussion

International service-learning is an increasingly popular way to bridge the internationalization and civic engagement goals of colleges and universities. Despite the many positive outcomes associated with participating in ISL (Elble, 2009; Ferrence & Bell, 2004; Kiely, 2004, 2005; King, 2006; Lewis & Niesenbaum, 2005; Pagano, 2003; Pisano, 2007), some have argued that students can get an equivalent cross-cultural experience within the United States (Jacoby, 2009; Marmon, 2007). This study directly compared similarly structured international and domestic service-learning Alternative Break programs to identify what, if any, differences may exist in students' experiences on these trips.

The results of this study show that there are significant and meaningful differences in students' experiences of international and domestic Alternative Breaks along key variables that have been shown to predict positive student outcomes. Of particular note is that students on international trips reported higher

levels of interaction and engagement with community members. These types of opportunities to interact across difference are one of the key features of service-learning programs that facilitate student learning. For example, Eyler and Giles (1999) found the "opportunity to work with people from diverse ethnic groups during the course of their service-learning" (p. 177) to be a significant predictor of decreasing stereotypes and increased tolerance for diversity, personal development, improved problem solving and critical thinking skills, and perspective transformation. Similarly, in a study of an Alternative Break program in New York City, Jones and colleagues (2009) found that the "face-to-face interactions and the opportunity to develop relationships with people living with HIV/AIDS made a deep impression on participants" (p. 17). Even a year after the experience it was the personal interactions with people living with HIV/AIDS that stood out in the students' memories.

Related to the enhanced opportunities for interaction and engagement with community members on international trips, students on international trips reported learning more from both community members and host site staff. This is consistent with Kraft's (2002) argument that the physical travel and cultural and language competencies necessitated by service abroad amplify the cross-cultural learning. This similarly echoes Couper's (2001) finding that students studying abroad experience more culture shock than students travelling domestically, and Uehara's (1986) finding that students studying abroad experienced



more re-entry shock upon returning home than students travelling domestically.

The focus on learning from diverse others through Alternative Breaks is particularly important, as learning from community members has been shown to be a significant predictor of the influence of the Alternative Break experience on students' major, career plans, and intentions to volunteer, engage in advocacy, and travel abroad. Similarly, interacting with host site staff has been found to be a significant predictor of the influence of the AB experience on students' career plans, major, and plans to travel abroad (Niehaus, 2012a).

Compared to students on domestic trips, students who had participated in international AB trips reported significantly higher levels of intensity. Kiely (2005) noted the importance of intensity in the program experience. He noted that high-intensity dissonance, which included experiences such as "witnessing extreme forms of poverty, hunger, scarcity, and disease" (p. 11), is the type that "often causes powerful emotions and confusion and leads study participants to *reexamine their existing knowledge and assumptions*" (p. 11, emphasis in original). This was distinct from low-level dissonance which often had to do with logistical and practical issues such as food and water, language barriers, and dealing with new surroundings, all of which lead to instrumental learning but not transformative learning. Niehaus (2012a) also found intensity to be a significant predictor of the influence of the AB experience on students' plans to volunteer after returning to campus.

It is interesting to note that there were a number of areas where domestic and international trips varied that seem like they would be independent of the program location. For example, the frequency with which students reflected on their experiences, either individually through journaling or through group discussions, is more a matter of program structure than of program location. Similarly, the orientation and reorientation activities that students participate in do not need to differ between international and domestic trips. However, this study found that students on international trips reflect more often and participate in more comprehensive orientation and reorientation programs, perhaps due to the more complex nature of international travel.

Ultimately, these findings run contrary to claims that students can have the same cross-cultural experiences within the United States as they have abroad (Jacoby, 2009; Marmon, 2007). Students participating in international Alternative Breaks reported significantly different experiences than those on domestic Alternative Breaks. At the same time, it is important to note that while significant and meaningful, these differences do not mean that domestic AB

experiences were not valuable. Students participating in these domestic programs still had relatively intense experiences and had the opportunity to interact with and learn from people different from themselves. Despite this, the results of this study clearly point to the importance of considering the advantages that an international program location might bring to the experience.

This study has a number of implications for practice and research. First, in pointing to the unique differences between students' experiences with international and domestic service-learning, this study provides support for practitioners seeking to facilitate international experiences for students. Although the focus of this study was on Alternative Breaks, the findings may have implications for supporting other types of international service-learning and study abroad. More research is needed to determine if the differences found within the context of AB programs also exist in other program contexts.

Second, in identifying the differences that do exist between international and domestic AB experiences, this study provides guidance for practitioners seeking to enhance the cross-cultural learning in domestic experiences. Because one of the key differences by program location was opportunities to interact with and learn from community members, practitioners facilitating domestic experiences may want to pay particular attention to this aspect of the AB or other domestic service-learning experience. Similarly, practitioners may need to help students participating in domestic experiences see and understand the cultural differences that do exist between themselves and community members or host site staff. These differences may be more obvious in international experiences, but are still present and important learning opportunities in domestic contexts.

Finally, more research is needed to better understand how students make meaning of international and domestic cross-cultural experiences in similar or different ways. Exploration of other differences in program location (urban versus rural, English-speaking or not, locations in which students identify with the racial majority or minority, etc.) may also provide insight into the ways in which the program location may influence student learning. In-depth qualitative research would help researchers come to an even greater understanding of students' experiences in these different contexts.

As institutions of higher education seek to promote the goals of civic engagement and global competence, ISL can be a key tool in working toward both of these goals simultaneously. While there is strong evidence for the powerful potential of domestic service-learning, the results of this study provide preliminary evidence supporting the unique experiences

that can be provided by ISL. As such, international programs should not be discounted as irrelevant or unnecessary even if cross-cultural learning is possible within the United States.

### Note

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